



**STATE OF WASHINGTON**  
**BOARD OF PILOTAGE COMMISSIONERS**

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[www.pilotage.wa.gov](http://www.pilotage.wa.gov)

**Summary of**  
**EXEMPTIONS from MANDATORY PILOTAGE**  
**(Puget Sound and Grays Harbor)**

As provided in the Revised Code of Washington (RCW) Section 88.16.070, every vessel in the Puget Sound Pilotage District - all Washington (WA) waters east of 123° 23' W - or the Grays Harbor Pilotage District – the waters of Grays and Willapa Harbors - is subject to compulsory WA pilotage unless exempt. The WA waters of the Columbia River Bar and the Columbia River are subject to the pilotage laws and rules set by the State of Oregon.

**AUTOMATIC EXEMPTION:**

Some vessels are automatically exempt as provided in the RCW. These include:

1. U.S. flag vessel on a voyage in which it is operating exclusively on its coastwise, fishery, and/or recreational (pleasure) endorsement.
2. U.S. or Canadian flag vessel engaged exclusively in the coasting (coastwise) trade on the west coast of the Continental United States (including Alaska) and/or British Columbia (BC).
3. Any flag vessel in/outbound to/from Canadian ports which employs a pilot licensed by the Pacific Pilotage Authority (BC Pilots); uses the CVTS; and has appropriate charts (within certain geographic limits).

**Notes regarding automatic exemption:**

- A U.S. flag vessel on a foreign voyage (not including BC) is not automatically exempt from WA Pilotage (i.e. a vessel sailing under a registry endorsement), but certain such vessels may apply for an exemption.

**BOARD-APPROVED EXEMPTION:**

Some vessels that are not automatically exempt may apply for a Board-approved exemption (including payment of a fee) as provided in the RCW. These include:

1. Any flag small passenger vessel not more than 500 GT (ITC) and not more than 200 feet overall length operated exclusively in the Puget Sound Pilotage District and lower BC.
  - A vessel carrying passengers for a fee, including yachts under a charter where vessel and crew are provided for a fee, is considered a passenger vessel and a Board-approved exemption applies only to Puget Sound (WA waters east of 123° 24' W).

2. Any flag yacht not more than 500 GT (ITC) and not more than 200 feet overall length.
  - A Board-approved exemption granted to a yacht is valid in both Puget Sound and Grays Harbor Pilotage Districts.
  - A yacht that engages in trade (carrying cargo or passengers for a fee) is not considered a yacht for the purpose of determining eligibility for a Board-approved exemption.
  - A vessel that is under “bare boat” charter (or any form of charter in which the charterer has complete control of the vessel, e.g. by covering all costs of the vessel including master and crew at the charterer’s expense) is considered a yacht for the purpose of determining eligibility for a Board-approved exemption if it is operated only for recreation/pleasure; does not engage in trade; and meets the tonnage and length requirements.

**Notes regarding Board-approved exemption:**

- A vessel that has an automatic exemption does not need to apply for a Board-approved exemption.
- The rules regarding making application for an exemption are found in WA Administrative Code (WAC) 363-116-360. That WAC; the required form (including fee requirements); and detailed instructions are found at our web site listed below.
- The owners or operators of the vessel must make application on a Board-approved form (see web site listed below and click on “Forms”) at least 60 days prior to arrival. The Board Chair may consider applications made less than 60 days prior.
- The applicant must pay the fee set in the WAC (listed on the application form - see above).
- The Board Chair makes a recommendation for Board consideration.
- The Board Chair may grant an interim exemption prior to the meeting of the Board (subject to Board approval).
- The applicant (or other interested parties) may request a hearing before the Board at a regular meeting with at least 5 days notice.
- The Board Chair and/or the Board may impose conditions necessary to protect WA waters.

**General notes:**

- Vessels exempt from WA Pilotage may be required to have or take a federal pilot as provided in U.S. (federal) laws and regulations.
- An automatic or Board-approved exemption granted by WA does not constitute an exemption from Oregon, BC, etc. pilotage. Check with those authorities.
- By federal treaty, Canadian recreational (pleasure) vessels are exempt from the application of certain U.S. federal and state laws (including pilotage) during short-term voyages into the U.S. The RCW does not specifically mention these vessels, but they are considered exempt by federal rule.
- U.S. Government vessels and certain government vessels of other nations (as set in various treaties) are exempt from WA Pilotage by federal rule.
- U.S. flag vessels may be chartered to non-U.S. citizens only as provided under rules administered by the Maritime Administration (MARAD). Failure to adhere to those rules may result in loss of flag status (plus other penalties) and create an ineligibility for exemption from WA pilotage.
- Any exempt vessel that opts to take a WA Pilot is subject to the WA pilotage rates.

**Additional Information:**

Contact the WA Board of Pilotage Commissioners at 206-515-3904 or visit our web site at <http://www.pilotage.wa.gov> for details.